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# AT NIGHT IN A HOSPITAL.

BY E. LYNN LINTON.

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THE London Hospital in Whitechapel Road, instituted A.D. 1740, while George II. was king, is an object familiar enough to all who pass that way; familiar too in a mournful if helpful sense to sundry poor souls who live in its neighbourhood and who are struck down by accident or disease. 'Situated on a high road of great traffic, in the midst of a district containing about one million persons, with extensive manufactories on all sides, and in close proximity to the various docks of the metropolis and to great railway centres; the London Hospital administers medical and surgical relief to a population pre-eminently exposed, by its density, to disease, and, by the nature of its employments, to sudden and painful accidents;" and is thus, *par excellence*, the hospital for surgical cases and the treatment of such diseases as come from poverty and insanitary conditions. "It is virtually a free hospital"—these quotations are made from the Report for 1874—"nearly three-fourths of the patients being received without the recommendation of subscribers, and admitted into the wards according to the severity of their cases as adjudged by the medical and surgical officers; while no accident, or similarly urgent case, from whatever quarter it may come, is ever turned away."

In the past year (1878), of in-patients, 4794 were admitted free, while 1654 were recommended by Governors—total, 6448; of out-patients 29,215 were

treated free, while 20,576 were recommended by subscribers—total, 49,791:—gross total of those treated by the hospital, 56,239. It has 790 beds; a fixed income of less than £14,000 a year, and an expenditure of more than thrice that amount. It is the largest hospital in the country, and essentially the hospital for the eastern half of London and the suburbs adjoining, where the population is, as we all know, the poorest in the metropolis and the most needing aid in times of distress.

Like almost all valuable things this hospital has grown to its present size and importance from comparatively humble beginning; its first start as “the London Infirmary” being made (1740) “in four houses (with 136 beds) hired on lease in Prescott Street, Goodman’s Fields. These houses being a constant source of outlay for repairs, the Governors opened a subscription in order to ‘purchase a piece of ground, and build a house more proper for enlarging and perpetuating their benevolent designs.’” The foundation stone was laid October 15, 1752, by Admiral Sir Peter Warren, Bart., K.B., and the building was finished by December 1759. The new hospital was fitted up with 130 beds; eleven wards remained unutilised, however, from want of funds.” Since then, by slow degrees, and with fluctuations of now pinch and now plenty—now a wing added here to meet the pressing demands of the time, and now wards shut up there for want of means to keep them open—the plan has grown into what it is; till, by the last new addition of the “Grocers’ Company’s Wing,” for which that worshipful body gave a donation of £25,000, the number of beds was raised to its present total of 790.

This, then, is a brief summary of the London Hospital in Whitechapel; the bones of the matter as it were to which living circumstances give flesh and human interest.

The present condition of the London Hospital is one of very great technical perfection. Those five-and-a-quarter acres of flooring, which room and ward, passage and staircase measure when added together, are as clean as if they had been laid down yesterday fresh from the plane; there are separate lifts for the food and the coals and the poor dead bodies when the last breath is drawn and the last act played out; speaking tubes and telegraph-bells carry orders and summon attendance without the loss of one moment of precious time; the fire brigade is in perfect organisation, and there is no *cul-de-sac* anywhere, so that in case such a calamity as a fire should occur, the patients could escape right and left all through the building. Add to this the important fact that there is no well staircase in the more modern additions; and thus the infected wards can at any time be shut off by cross-doors, which, with open windows, effectually isolate and ventilate. In this manner the erysipelas wards are shut off from the rest of the hospital; the nurses have their own staircase; the service has its own organisation; and the patients are absolutely isolated from the rest of the hospital.

The cooking is done by steam and gas; and since this method was adopted, about £620 a year in money is saved by the less waste of raw meat. And to save waste at the spit is no small matter when we remember that daily rations have to be cooked for nearly one thousand persons—the force of the London Hospital when all the beds are full. (The paid staff numbers two hundred and fifty persons, from the Governor down to the charwomen. The honorary visiting staff is twenty-six.) The laundry, too, is managed by steam, which is also a saving of money and labour, and when “soap, &c.,” figures at £294 0s. 1d., we can imagine that any economy, which is economy of method not stint of service, is

of infinite importance in the wise management of matters.

Going on with the accounts, these items are not uninteresting. Of artificial ice from 17 to 18 cwt. is used weekly; the milk bill is over £2100 yearly; eggs cost more than £820, and vegetables stand at only a few pounds less; butter is £653 19s. 4d. for the year; bread stands at £1386 14s. 3d.; meat at £5477 18s. 7d.; there is hot and cold water from garret to basement, and the water bill is £190 7s. 8d.; while firing and light come to £2658 7s. 2d.

Most of us have been through the wards of a hospital by day, but few have been admitted as visitors in the night. This valuable privilege and rare experience were granted to one other and myself, both taken in the skirts of a dear and gracious lady, the wife of one of our leading physicians, and herself well known for her zeal in hospital work and sanitary matters generally. The very drive in the late evening from one of the fashionable West-End centres through the slackening traffic of the city, and on to that toiling, noisy, crowded Whitechapel with its look of sitting up all night, and where even the children never seem to go to bed, doing its business as diligently at midnight as at noonday, and as careless of rest as of repose—this drive itself is an experience worth having. At first we meet only the carriages of the rich and great whirling off their wealthy occupants to stately dinner-parties which *chefs* and *cordons bleus* make works of art as well as of science, and where the whole round of beauty and luxury is complete. Then the private carriages cease, and we come into the region of street cabs and omnibuses filled with the subordinates of the business world going home to their little villas in the suburbs; and, finally, these add to themselves tramcars, carts and barrows,



blocking up streets where all the shops are open and the gin-palaces are in full force, and where apparently the whole population is astir, and active life at its briskest. Through them we steer our way with more or less difficulty, till we come to the immense building, stretching out its two hospitable arms, which we have set out to see. There we are received by the Governor, who has undertaken to be our guide and local encyclopædia, and our work of visiting begins.

All the offices below are in a blaze of light, ready for use at an instant's notice. The dispensary and receiving-room are in full working order, and the one object of existence is how to mitigate the pain and save the life of the first poor creature who may be brought in, crushed, maimed, poisoned, paralysed, or in any way whatsoever reduced from the ranks of capable and healthy humanity to those of suffering and disease. The place is thus kept open and active up to three o'clock in the morning; and even when the principal officials have gone to bed, the hospital is still available, and help still at hand. The house surgeon and physician of the week live just over the entrance; and should any case of severity, demanding instant treatment, be admitted, they can be roused in a moment and at their blessed craft of healing, in almost as little time as it takes to tell. By the way, one of the present house surgeons was taken prisoner during the Turkish War, and carried off as one of the valuable captures made by the chance of the hour.

While we are looking round the room we hear the shrill shrieks of a child, and a group of women sympathisers, surrounding an agonised mother, rush in with a baby which has hurt its arm. No bones, however, are broken; and we leave the room while the surgeon is examining the poor screaming mite, and go upstairs into the wards which are being got

ready for the night. We go first into the children's ward, where most of the little ones are asleep, but some are awake and tranquil, and one is coughing and crying feebly. It has abscess of the lungs, and there will evidently be a sharp struggle here with death, and heavy odds against the ultimate victory! One little poppet of three months old is sleeping quietly with its bottle by its side, and a broken thigh as the reason why it is here at all; one beautiful bright-eyed creature stares at us mutely as we pass before its bed, and wonder when those bad burns will be healed, and if it will ever grow up into maturity. It is a child lovely enough to have made the pride of many a wealthy house where heirs are wanting; in its own it has not so much care taken of it as our cook's pet cat receives, and it is an even chance whether it will ever live to grow up at all, running the gauntlet of the thousand dangers by which it is beset through ignorance, poverty, neglect, and evil conditions of all kinds. Here, again, is one whose arm is not much thicker than a penholder, and whose legs and body are wasted by starvation to less than the average size of a newborn infant. The Sister who is with us turns down the bedclothes from the unconscious sleeper, and we see what is not easily forgotten—that fearful evidence of hunger and want! How much that poor little creature of ten months old has already suffered! My lady's lapdog is fed with the choicest dainties beyond the reach of the ordinary middle class; my lord's horses are pampered and petted till life within them waxes so strong that it turns to the hurt of those who have fostered it to such excess; but this poor little human being, this miserable child of man, has been left to starve out of all semblance to its kind; so that as it lies there it is more like a monkey wanting the fur than the heir of all the ages, and the possessor, as we are taught to believe,

of an immortal soul. But what poverty has done on the one hand, this good hospital has been trying to undo on the other ; and by a little judicious feeding and care, perhaps our little furless monkey may become once more human, and be placed in such conditions that its brain can grow and its body become strong. Another little creature is really—to unaccustomed eyes—an awful object. It has a hare lip, and they are growing a (in a sense) new nose which exists at present as an engrafted bulb, and which is to be brought down and thrust into the cavity. This will then be sewn over it, and from a hideous gaping deformity that engrafted bulb will transform the mouth into something quite bearable, though always scarred and marked.

This is a wonderfully ingenious operation, more wonderful, indeed, than the famous Taliacotian ; but we have by no means exhausted the possibilities of medical science, and as years pass by and knowledge increases we shall do something more yet than even make a hare-lip and cleft palate sightly and serviceable. About all the babies' cots are toys and pictures, some of which are retained for the amusement of the restless little wideawake ; but the most part are laid aside till the sleeping time has passed, and the small sufferer wakes once more to life and light ; and everywhere are flowers supplied by the Flower Mission, and greatly prized by young and old. There are many, very many cases under seven years of age ; and scalds, burns, broken limbs, and accidents generally are of terribly frequent occurrence among the children of the district.

Passing from the babies we go into the men's wards, where the lights are still turned up as the surgeon is making his last round for the night. A handsome young fellow, a slater, has his bitter portion dealt out to him in the shape of abscesses. One in his arm sucks all the strength out of him, he says with

a sigh. Whatever food he puts into his body goes to feed it, not him—he is none the better for it! The bad place in his arm drains him dry as soon as he is full; and it's just a waste of good material, that's where it is in his opinion! He is unmarried, and he lived in lodgings where he had everything to do for himself; and when he was first taken ill and his back was so bad, it made him, he thinks, worse to have to do for himself with no one to help him. He is well off now, he says, and the gentlemen and nurses do all they can for him. In the same ward is another case of desperate, almost unmanageable ulceration; where five hundred bits of healthy skin have been taken from the living body and engrafted into the sore. This is a very common operation nowadays; and one lad bared his arm where a small scar showed that a piece had been taken from it for his own leg. He was immensely proud of the transaction; so was another, whose ankle, he said, was like a map—he had a bit of a Scotchman and a bit of an Irishman in it, and Lord knows what more; good luck that he had not added a bit of a negro as well, repeating in the wards of the London Hospital the famous miracle of S.S. Cosmo and Damian in the desert!

The accident wards are full of painful interest containing as they do men struck down in the prime of life, and from health and vigour reduced to helplessness and anguish. One fine fellow, a railway porter, was run over by an engine and desperately hurt, but not quite killed. He lay for six hours on the line before he was found and taken up. He is now recovering; but they have had a hard fight for it! Another was ripped right up the back, the spine being laid bare and the bones slightly injured; but neither concussion of the brain nor paralysis supervened, and he is now recovering, if slowly. One old man had been a teetotaller, to which he attributes

his safe and speedy recovery from a horrible accident that befell him one unlucky day ; and one man, a butcher, had the narrowest escape from unintentional suicide on the Japanese plan, for, missing his stroke, he cut, not the joint, but his own abdomen, and nearly bled to death before they could sew up the wound.

This hospital is, as we have said, the place, *par excellence*, for accidents, also, it would seem, for strange and skilful operations. There is a curious case of deformed leg at this moment under treatment, and we see both the cast of the original limb and the living member as now rearranged. This—a case of twisted knee—a knee so much turned inwards as to make the leg and thigh almost at right angles with each other. A small incision was made at the side of the knee, and then with a chisel and a hammer the bone was broken, and reset so as to make a straight limb. It was then slung in a fracture cradle ; ice applied to the joint ; in due time a weight attached to the foot to help in preventing contraction ; and when the bone is thoroughly reset, the lad will be almost like any other, with perhaps a slight shortening of the leg that had been deformed. Another similar case, where both legs were in-kneed, was treated in the same manner, and a complete cure effected ; and another of like nature was what is called ankylosis of the hips, that is, a complete stiffness by the joint becoming a solid mass with no play or action. This case, which we did not see, was that of a little street waif sent to the hospital by a London magistrate. He was between five and six years old, and both limbs were stiffened. Placed under the proper anæsthetics the bones were broken as in the foregoing instances, and as so much marble might be crushed, and now the little fellow goes about gaily, fit to take his place with the rest of the running and walking race.

These tremendous operations would scarcely be possible without the two great blessings of what is called mixed narcosis and Lister's antiseptic treatment. The first consists of an injection of morphia under the skin, under the influence of which the patient is carried gently downstairs to the operating room. There he is further narcotised by chloroform or ether—the former if he be before twelve or after sixty; the latter if between those two periods, as ether is too stimulating for the very young or old—and the operation begins. The effect of the ether passes when the operation is completed; but that of the morphia remains, and the patient sleeps through what was once the worst time, thus lessening the chances of fever and preserving his strength. Pain naturally comes with the return of consciousness, but it is mitigated and can be borne better because there has been so much less exhaustion; also by the new method which almost totally prevents the loss of blood in amputation, much exhaustion and suffering are spared. But I will come to this presently. By Lister's antiseptic method of treating wounds and operations all fever is prevented, and pyæmia or gangrene is almost stamped out. The wound or place operated on is placed under a fine continuous carbolic spray; all the appliances of dressing are steeped in the same fluid; the wound is washed with carbolic acid; and no germs from the atmosphere—that source of infection and surgical fevers—can find a nidus where they can propagate. The wound heals kindly and in far less time than even under the most favourable natural conditions, thus preventing many after effects which are worse than the original evil. Thus, a poor lad was brought in with a wound in his forehead, from the inner corner of his eye upwards, which laid the bone bare, the skin lying down like a loose flap. Mr. Couper took the case in hand, and the boy so far aided in that he lay absolutely and

rigidly still. The wound was first well cleansed with carbolic acid; the dressing was made under the Lister spray, the edges were adjusted as neatly as one adjusts the most delicate broken porcelain, then the skin was sewn up from the eye to the scalp. The boy had no fever, and in three days the wound was "as dry as a bone." Had there been inflammation or suppuration he would have lost his eyesight and perhaps his life. As it is, he escaped with a scar—*balafre* certainly for life—but with his eyesight unimpaired, and his health and reason as good as ever.

In the women's wards the most interesting case we see is that of a delicate looking girl who had been in a trance for a fortnight, during which time they had been forced to feed her through her nose. She is now scarcely awake to the world about her, half-doing, half-swooning; but she can be roused; and the Sisters and nurses take care that she does not fall back into her old condition for want of rousing. Another case is that of a woman whose temperature rose to the incredible height of  $112^{\circ}$ , and yet she lives: and a case is recorded of a paradoxical temperature of  $115^{\circ}$ :—which surely could have lasted but a very short time, else the patient must have perished. The temperature card is the true storm-signal in all surgical cases. The dot gives the note of danger before the finger has found it out; and no matter how well the wound looks, the chart of the temperature tells its own tale, and when that is high bad results may be expected. But it seems that we have to modify the current belief that no one can live whose temperature goes beyond  $107^{\circ}$ . "Temperature gone clean over the top of the card, sir!" says a bright-eyed Irishman; and that top of the card marks 108.

In the Jews' ward we come upon a different physiognomy and certain differences of condition. To

begin with, the poorer Israelites have all a German's horror of ventilation, and draw their bed-curtains close about their heads and faces whenever they have the chance. They have all things separate and appropriate; their own meat killed according to the law by their own butcher; the two distinct waste-pipes, by which their own kitchen refuse is carried away, so that the washings of the plates and dishes where meat has been may not be mingled with other articles of food; during Passover separate milk; and a special cupboard where all utensils used during Passover are kept, and never touched nor even looked at in the interim. The cupboard might swarm with mice or cockroaches, red ants or blackbeetles, but it would not be opened even for the purposes of cleansing—so strict are these ancient people in the smallest as well as the greatest matters of their faith. A piece of Passover cake is fastened over the door of the ward appropriated to them, renewed yearly; and the Scroll of the Law, in a small tin cylinder, remains as the sign and shield of the race which it both demonstrates and protects.

As time wears on the most interesting experience begins. One by one the lights are turned down, and the wards are in that half visible darkness proper to the sick room. Through the long corridors we see the dim figures of Sister and nurse quietly moving about the beds where the restlessness of the patient needs attention. Here a whispered conference between Sister and doctor marks something of importance—who knows what? There a screen drawn round the bed, a bright light behind, and shadows thrown upward on the wall, betray the fact of some necessary operation—perhaps tapping a patient for dropsy, or it may be the sad watching for the last moment so near at hand. For the deaths are sometimes many in this hospital: not because of want of care and skill, emphatically No! but because the



cases brought in are so exceptionally severe that not even all the care and skill of the best surgeons and physicians can save them. Seven hundred deaths in the year, or ten and a half per cent., rank high in the death average; but those who know why are not disheartened; on the contrary, the wonder is that there are not more.

In our rounds we come upon a private room where the night Sisters are at breakfast. It is about ten o'clock, and they have just finished what stands with them for our first morning's meal. They dine after midnight, and sup at nine A.M., when the ordinary working world is astir; then go to bed in the sunshine, and sleep while others play. It is a difficult habit to acquire at first, they say, but practice makes perfect here as elsewhere; and after a time nature accommodates herself to the new *régime*, and sleep comes as easily in the bright midday as it used in the quiet midnight.

It is too much the custom to think of our medical students as so many rollicking, rude Bob Sawyers, mainly occupied in wrenching off knockers and squaring up to the police; haunters of the Hay-market, proficient in slang, steeped to the lips in vulgar fastness all round; detestable moral embryos who may develop into decent men enough at the end of their transition stage, but who, during this stage, are simply abominable. A different idea of these young students from that cherished by ordinary prejudice, would be had in the wards of such a hospital as the "London," where often life has to be saved by main force, as it were, and workers must sacrifice themselves if any good is to be done. Take the case of that poor fellow who was brought in at death's door with an aneurism. Fourteen students volunteered to compress the artery, and the man was saved. And this compression of the artery means simply that someone stands by the bed with

his finger pressed tight upon the spot, never relaxing the pressure nor releasing the strain. For forty-four hours this compression was continued; then came the break of a day; then one strain of twenty-two hours more—and the man was saved. He was a fine stalwart fellow, a young engineer, into whose life these fourteen brave, good lads poured their own courage and strength and patient endurance. They gave up food, and sleep, and rest, and pleasure, to take their turn at saving this unknown brother; and surely one such living example as this ought to tell against twenty adverse fancy portraits. This instance, too, shows the good of great hospitals. Where else could such a volunteer force have been gathered together? Truly, in some respects, the poor are better tended in sickness than are the rich, and more successfully treated. In even the best organised private house, where an operation has to be performed, the surgeon has to think of everything that may be necessary, when, as he is not infallible, he may forget something. Here, in a large hospital, everything is at hand, everything is in the best possible working order, while dozens of assistants are ready and willing to supply such aid as may be necessary. It may as well be said here that the alternative to this long finger compression of the aneurism is a deep and dangerous incision, then hooking up the artery and tying it—an operation by no means always successful, and at all times full of peril.

Also that gradual perfecting of the plan to prevent loss of blood in amputation, due to Dr. Esmark, of Kiel, and already alluded to, is one of great interest and importance. The limb to be amputated is tightly bound in india-rubber bandages, beginning from the toes or fingers upward, until every drop of blood is expelled from the veins, and the limb is as blanched and as bloodless as so much marble:—

then, above the point of amputation, a strong, widely-stretched india-rubber cord is tied, which prevents all circulation so absolutely, that a man may almost perform the operation in his dress clothes, without a drop of blood being spilt. It is easy to understand what an immense boon this system is to the patient, and what a saving of strength by the reduction of exhaustion consequent on loss of blood.

And now our passage through the silent, dimly-lighted wards is over; and we go downstairs once more to the scene and centre of activity—to the place, too, of the End. A long passage below, in part leading round the open court, takes us to those two mournful rooms—the dead-house, where the coffins lie concealed in closed shelves, and the post-mortem room adjoining. There is only one occupant of that silent bed at this time, but once there were seventeen in one night—the most that have ever been at the same time. A poor little bundle lies on the table ready for the friends to take away—such a poor little bundle of ragged clothes!—such a mournful voiceless essay on the pains of poverty that had been endured—on the want, and misery, and ignorance, and starvation, that had slowly brought the wearer to the hospital first, to the churchyard last! These catacombs, as the room is called, are not only absolutely isolated from the rest of the building, but all connected with the dead is silent, separate, concealed. The bodies are lowered to the dead-house by a separate lift, placed in the coffins, and taken away at night or early in the morning. No one sees or hears, or is shocked or startled. It is all done with silent reverence for the dead and thoughtful care for the living; and one cannot help feeling that in most instances this death is a release, and eternity sweet repose.

Then we go back to the entrance again; look into the padded room where they place, say, the dipso-

maniacs, or others suffering from delirium or mania not manageable by other methods, and where once a powerful maniac nearly throttled the strongest man in the establishment; and as one last experience we look into the operating room, which is in full light but untenanted. Here we pry into the large glass case of instruments, where we read strange labels, such as "guillotines" for the tonsils, and "butcher's saws" for the larger bones; and where are bone forceps and knives, needles and scoops, and instruments for cleft palates, and a wealth of ingenuity in form and intention which makes us simply marvel.

And then we take our leave of the kind guides and interpreters who have accompanied and explained; and as we drive back through the darkened and deserted streets, we say one to the other that the London Hospital deserves to be more widely known and more vigorously supported than even it is; for that what we have seen of pain relieved, sickness healed, and death prevented—of human care and kindness devoted to the mitigation of human suffering—of science, and intellect, and education all employed and improved for the service of the race—what this one little experience of one short night has shown us—proves the exceeding value of the institution:—which may God bless and man maintain!















